

Meta taps Reliance for first AI-enabled data centre in India

AFP | Mumbai, India

Facebook-parent Meta and Indian conglomerate Reliance Industries yesterday announced a deal to develop an AI-enabled data centre in the state of Gujarat, as the US tech giant scales its digital footprint globally.

The project, to be built in Jamnagar district, comes as technology giants race to expand computing capacity needed to support generative AI services in the world's fastest-growing major economy.

Reliance will develop a 168-megawatt data centre to be delivered within two years, while Meta will lease capacity

from the facility, the companies said in a joint statement.

The financial details of the agreement were not disclosed.

Meta chief Mark Zuckerberg said it was "proud" to partner with Reliance on its "first AI-enabled data centre in India".

"This world-class facility in Jamnagar will help us scale our AI infrastructure globally while deepening our long-term investment in India's economy," Zuckerberg said.

Reliance chairman Mukesh Ambani described the announcement as India's "first built-to-suit data centre for a global technology leader of Meta's scale".



Pope arrives at Barcelona's Sagrada Familia to bless new tower

AFP | Barcelona, Spain

Pope Leo XIV arrived yesterday at Barcelona's famed Sagrada Familia Basilica to bless its giant new tower and celebrate mass inside what is now the world's tallest

church.

The pontiff, who arrived in Barcelona from Madrid on Tuesday, was welcomed outside the basilica by King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia, among others, AFP journalists reported.

Leaders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE invited to G7: Macron

AFP | Paris, France

Leaders from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates will be invited to participate in a G7 session in France next week to discuss the Middle East war, the French president said

Wednesday.

Next Tuesday's summit session will focus on the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which has "a real impact on our economies" due in particular to soaring fuel prices, and on "negotiations on Iran", Emmanuel Macron said.

Lyft, Baidu to start testing robotaxis in London

AFP | London, United Kingdom

Chinese tech giant Baidu will start testing its autonomous vehicles in London "in the coming weeks", US ride-hailing platform Lyft, its partner on launching the capital's robotaxi service, told AFP Wednesday.

It comes after Wayve, a British startup specialised in artificial intelligence for self-driving vehicles, said Monday it was ready to launch its robotaxi service with Uber in London as early as this summer.

Lyft executive Jeremy Bird

told AFP that his company's "autonomous vehicles will be on the (London) streets soon, in the coming weeks" after already arriving.

"They need to get inspected and pass (tests)... and then they'll be out on the streets," Bird said, adding that the company hopes to launch commercial operations this year.

Self-driving taxis are already in operation in the United States and in China, but a commercial deployment in London would be a first for Europe.

Customers will have to wait a little longer for fully driverless taxi rides in the British capital, however, as Wayve plans to launch its vehicles with an operator behind the wheel.

The American giant Waymo, a subsidiary of Google parent Alphabet, hopes also to launch its driverless vehicles in London by the end of 2026 after mapping the capital for several months.

The world leader in driverless cars currently operates in eleven US cities, while Baidu's autonomous vehicle subsidiary -- Apollo Go -- operates in 27 Chinese cities and in Dubai.

Saudi's new national carrier gets off ground

● **Riyadh Air, the country's second state-owned airline after Jeddah-based Saudia, is meant to help turn the Saudi capital into a global hub to rival Dubai**

AFP | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia launched its second national carrier Riyadh Air after more than a year of delays yesterday.

A London-bound Boeing 787 Dreamliner in Riyadh Air's white and lavender livery took off at 2:30am (2330 GMT Tuesday), putting in motion a flagship project in Saudi Arabia's push to reduce its economic reliance on oil.

Riyadh Air, the country's second state-owned airline after Jeddah-based Saudia, is meant to help turn the Saudi capital into a global hub to rival Dubai, the world's busiest for international passengers.

"We want to bring glamour, we want to bring refinement, we want to bring grace back," Riyadh Air CEO Tony Douglas told AFP.

The launch, originally planned for 2025, was set back by delivery delays from Boeing, which has suffered a series of manufacturing and safety problems in recent years.



A Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft of Saudi airline Riyadh Air is pictured on the tarmac at King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh



tribulations, you win some, you lose some, you make progress, you sometimes have setbacks, but you have made it, and this day we've made it," added the CEO.

Saturated market?

Saudi Arabia is building a major new airport in Riyadh with a planned capacity of 120 million passengers a year by 2030, compared to 53 million at the existing King Khalid International Airport.

Riyadh Air is owned by the \$900 billion Public Investment Fund, the main vehicle for de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's ambitious Vision 2030 economic reforms.

In a statement of intent, the airline ordered 132 Boeing 787 Dreamliners and last June signed for 25 Airbus A350-1000s, with an option for 50 more.

"Our ambition is to be able to connect to over 100 international

cities over the next five years," Douglas said.

At a ceremony celebrating the first planes' delivery, PIF chief and Riyadh Air chairman Yasir Al-Rumayyan described "a historic moment for the nation" and said the company would create "200,000 direct and indirect jobs".

Saudi Arabia, which is hosting the 2030 World Expo and the 2034 football World Cup, and welcomes millions of pilgrims to Mecca each year, aims to triple its annual air traffic to 330 million passengers by 2030.

"You have the trials and the

132

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NASA head defends Artemis 3 crew of all men

AFP | Washington, United States

NASA's administrator Jared Isaacman yesterday defended the makeup of the space agency's latest Artemis crew, an all-male group.

The nominations have earned criticism that NASA may have



acted in accordance with President Donald Trump's direction to eliminate diversity and inclusion efforts.

Isaacman insisted in a lengthy social media post that the "crew selection does not involve any political appointees."

"The Astronaut Office assigns the crew that gives the mission the best chance of meeting its objectives, taking into account many factors, including the background and expertise of the astronauts, such as test pilot experience, development work on specific programs, and availability."

The third phase of Artemis will involve testing the Orion spacecraft and conducting rendezvous and docking tests with lunar landers. It will not include a Moon voyage.

NASA had previously committed to put both a woman and a person of color on the lunar surface.

Last year, however, NASA

removed language regarding that commitment and diversity more broadly from some of its web pages, as Trump directed federal agencies to eliminate Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs and references.

That doesn't necessarily mean NASA's pledge has been scrapped, but it's no longer explicit. Isaacman said "those raising this concern may not be aware of the pipeline of crews," including those "undergoing lunar-specific training that would be a better fit for a future surface mission."

Three missing, 21 rescued from vessel attacked off Oman: India

AFP | New Delhi, India

Three Indian crew members were missing and 21 others were rescued after an attack yesterday on a commercial vessel off the coast of Oman, India's foreign ministry said.

"We condemn the attack on the commercial vessel Settebello off the coast of Oman," the ministry said in a statement, adding that the Indian embassy "is closely monitoring the situation and proactively coordinating with the Omani authorities in the ongoing search and res-



cue operation".

British maritime security company Vanguard Tech ear-

lier said that the Palau-flagged tanker Settebello had "transmitted a distress call stating that its

engine room had been struck by a missile", reporting a fire on-board and at least one casualty.



The first commercial robotaxi services began operating in the United States and China, allowing passengers to travel without a human driver behind the wheel.